

founded League of Canadian Poets, a kind of poets' writers' trade union, whose leading programme was to encourage poets to write. The only really distinctive poets are the ones who have been published in the country's major literary magazines. Such reading matters here which disadvantages, since they encourage self-dramatization, as they poets like Irving Layton and Al Purdy tend to cultivate a clovenly persona, no-one (cockswain and drinkers) that have little relation to the real qualities of their poetry, and one good poet at least, Leonard Cohen, has been almost entirely ignored away from the ambiguous world of pop music. At the same time the readings, which take place mainly on university and college campuses and in the limits of the counter-culture where poetry shares the same kind of prestige as music and such crafts as pottery and weaving, provide both an appreciative audience for the poetry and a market for the books and magazines, probably more effective than the costly independent network of bookshops in Canada.

As for the poets themselves, Dorothy Livesay, a veteran of the 1930s movement in Canada who is now enjoying a renewed career as a poet of cunning insights (only recently published her collected poems, significantly subtitled "The Two Seasons"), remarked to me a few days ago that never before in Canada had the poets been so personally and so productively in touch. Perhaps for the first time since 1867 a genuine nationwide sense of community exists among the hundreds of poetical Canadian verse-writers, yet this has done nothing to lessen the strong regionalist feelings that Canadian poets, in their vast distances and differences, in duces among contemporary Canadian poets as much as it does among other artists. Often one feels that if a true federalism survives anywhere in Canada, it does so among the artists with their intense local loyalties and their countrywide links.

One of the most striking features of the recent poetry renaissance in Canada has been its non-genera-

tional character, which is linked to an essentially non-doctrinaire approach in formal terms. The only really distinctive poets are a group of disciples of Charles Olson who originally published a magazine called *7ish* in the early 1960s and now cluster around *Open Letter*, whose editor Frank Davy is their leading theoretician and an interesting lesser poet.

It is true that hundreds of young poets have emerged, and writers who were beginning their work or had yet to begin it in 1950, like Margaret Atwood and Gwen MacEwen, George Bowering, and Michael Ondaatje, Alden Nowlan and Tom Marshall, have during these years established what seem to be lasting reputations and have accumulated considerable bodies of excellent verse. Margaret Atwood's *Selected Poems*, for example, has just appeared, a decade after her first collection, *The Circle Game*, and it is not only a large volume of 240 pages, but also extremely expressive in its imaginative depth and its enigmatic variety. These younger poets have tended to move into the centre of the literary world, influencing fiction (Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Gwen MacEwen's *Julian the Magician* are among the most important recent Canadian novels and have influenced the genre greatly in the direction of prose fantasy) and writing excellent criticism, so that most of the better young critics writing in Canada today are also poets.

At the same time, there have been middle-aged poets who in the prevalent atmosphere of enthusiasm and activity have escaped what looked like being future mediocrities to enjoy long stretches of creative originality. Al Purdy is an example. His first book appeared in 1944, but for almost two decades he wrote low-keyed poems in rich resources; until in 1962, with *the Amulettes*, followed by *The Cariboo Horrors* of 1965, he found his own characteristic loose-running colloquial style and has since

emerged as one of the best of the current poets. John Glassco, after a Bohemian youth splendidly recalled in his 1970 book *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, virtually retired into a noiseless rusticity for almost thirty years, but at the very end of the 1950s began to write verse again, and since then, in collections like *The Defiant Made Flesh* and *A Point of Sky*, he has produced many poems, elegiac and ironic by turns, that reflect rural life and his philosophical emotions. Glassco is formally conservative, a kind of latter-day Augustan touched by the decadence (the once wrote a completion to Beardsley's unfinished *Under the Hill*), but it is typical of the contemporary poetic world in Canada that he is greatly respected among poets whose work—like that of Nichol and Bill Bissett—runs to the extremes of concreteness or—like that of J. Michael McGee and Andrew Schroeder—is fervently surrealist.

Most striking of all is perhaps the way in which "elder" poets, who had made names for themselves in past decades, were taken up into the stream of the movement and began to write again, not only renewing but also redirecting their poetic energies. Dorothy Livesay, whom I have already mentioned, is an example: during the past decade or so she has written with a power and acuteness she never showed in her earlier leftist-1930s phase. P. K. Pope emerged from many years of total silence to write the sonnet-driven lyrics that figure in her *Cry Ararat* of 1967, and has been writing steadily since then poems intense in their visual sharpness and irradiated by her Sufi philosophy. And it was when he had made names for himself in the past that Earle Birney began to wander over the world and to bring back from his travels the finest poems of his career, collected in such books as *Ice Cold Bell* or *Stone and Near False Creek*. These poems, that transformed the Anglo-Saxon tradition of his earlier years into a toying, joking, conversational measure, heavy with person and passion, with slyness of injustice and love of the bright surface of life.

The consideration of themes has played such a part in recent Canadian criticism, under the not-always-good influence of Northrop Frye (who in 1971 collected his essays on Canadian writers in *The Great Canadian Novel* and later of Margaret Atwood (whose *Survival*—1972—with its sharp analysis of the effects of colonialism, on artistic expression

was influential in fostering sentiments of literary nationalism), that one approaches it with caution, since it has been the refuge of many critics ill-equipped to consider the formal aspects of poetry. Yet it is on the thematic level that the common ground among Canadian poets is most evident. There are, of course, some poets to whom none of the conventional generalizations apply; the high aestheticism of D. G. Jones (in such collections as *Phrases from Orpheus*) and the spiritual intensity of Margaret Atwood's devotional verse in *The Dumbfounded* find no place on any distinctively Canadian map of thought, and there are many other equally private poets, with slight local or temporal loyalties, among the hundreds who have been published in Canada during recent years.

Nevertheless there is a kind of historic-geographic-social continuum within which the content and the actual cast of surprisingly much recent Canadian poetry can best be viewed. This is the first Canadian generation with virtually no pioneer experience: the first generation free of what Frye has called "the garrison mentality," the sense that human society lives on guard against the threatening wilderness and therefore dare not accept the present or the immediate past. Such a mentality made nineteenth-century and even early twentieth-century Canadian poets write in the forms and accept the sentiments of a literary and secure England, which seemed to guard them against the hostile emptiness of their own land but also against the equally hostile nuclei of population south of the border. The sense of the United States as a hostile presence has hardly diminished, and its dark thread of apprehension continued to run through Canadian writing, as Al Purdy's *North American Anthology* *The Now Romances* clearly demonstrated, but the wilderness, and the past which the ancestors first experienced it, or being explored intensively by poets who realize not only that they have a land which, of itself, is harshly neutral and different, and at best magnificently lovely.

If one accepts E. J. Pratt, who saw such matters in an ambiguously optimistic way when he wrote his poems about the "Joult mortuary" and the "building of the Canadian Pacific Railway," Canadian history has been a prize little appeal for earlier Canadian poets. Even in the 1950s it

was a minor theme, but recently has assumed major importance. One finds Margaret Atwood re-creating the trials of early British immigrants in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Al Purdy tracing the Loyalist route in *In Search of Owen Roblin*, and others who are re-creating the trials of William Lyon Mackenzie's found poems; Susan Musgrave's *The Imposture* exploring the mythology of Indians on the Pacific Coast; and a whole covey of poets writing about the rebellions of 1870 and 1885. More recent writing has been the poetic attempt to come to terms with the vast and climatically extreme expanses of unsettled Canada that in the past have been the despair of pioneers and poets alike. Until recently even the settled prairies, which once many sought in novels of human endurance (as Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*), were singularly unproductive of poetry. Lately, however, younger poets like John Newlove, Dale Zircow and Andy Suknait have written with remarkable vividness about living and travelling on the great plains. Indeed, the long Canadian highways have inspired a new recent poem that Doug Pefferling made an anthology of them, entitled *Thimbleprints*.

Patrick Lane in particular has succeeded in his poems (the last collection being *Between the Mountains of Fire*) in expressing the stark contrast between the highest towns (often decaying after less than a century of life) and the wilderness through which the great road passes. Sid Marty, a game warden in the Rockies, has written in *Hendriesters* a book of poems about the Rockies distinguished by clear observation and tight narrative, and Lil Mandel, whose selected poems appeared recently under the title of *Crusoe*, has taught his special despair of those prairie villages which the great highways are by-passing and killing. In other poets—Raymond Souster and William Waddington in eastern Canada, and Wayne in the west—the splendour and mysteries of Canadian cities are evoked, and one remembers that this is also the generation which Canada, despite its vast land area, became in terms of population one of the most urbanized countries in the world.

It would be an oversimplification to speak of recent Canadian poetry as a poetry of place and past, yet the presence of that most powerfully human it.

Transatlantic exchanges

By Esmond Wright

PETER LYON (Editor):
Britain and Canada
Survey of a Changing Relationship
191pp. Cass, £7.50.

The twelve papers printed in *Britain and Canada* were composed for or written after a conference at St. Catherine's, Cumberland Lodge, in 1971. The contributors are a conclave of experts themselves for the most part so North American in background that far many of them their precise nationalities are almost elusive. They include the late Alastair Buchan, taken as a ray of light of seventeen to Ottawa, when his Scottish Borderer father made Governor General and becoming among many other things, a Canadian mariner; two Canadian contributors (James Bayne and Freda Hawkins) who were themselves British immigrants; and two British contributors, John Holmes and Arthur Smith, who were largely British-educated; and Harry Johnson of the London School of Economics and Chicago, and Max Beloff of Buckingham and All Souls, who are transatlantic

polymaths. Indeed, when there can be this degree of easy transatlantic academic exchange, where and what is the problem to be analysed? The book asks: "Are relations between Britain and Canada steadily drifting apart... are they being stabilised and reinforced... are they bedevilled by a cynicism which might reply: 'Are these loaded and jargon words used, in fact, academic inventiveness seeking to create a problem that exists only in the minds of colloquy-organizers? Has not Canada, in fact, reached smooth and near-total independence, and is it not all that there is to say?'"

The Commonwealth, the North Atlantic, the problems of the forty-ninth parallel, yes. But what is special, and if special, worrying, in the bilateral British-Canadian relationship—if relationship it now is? Or does this cynical claim just reflect the old irritating English superiority? For, Dr. Lyon tells us, when the first suggestions were made by the Canadians that this conference be held, there was a tense reply: "What is there to talk about?" For Canadians, given their history, and given the awkward fact that between 1945 and 1970 over 900,000 British immigrants have gone there (constituting 28 per cent of all

Canada's post-war immigrants) the nature of their identity and of the Anglo connection (Dr. Lyon's curious word for so Scotch-Irish a flowering) to them matters a great deal.

And this particular conference, in all its wide-ranging character, seemed—if the conference report fairly reflects it—to have found difficulty in defining its terms. Perhaps it reflects a neurosis in both countries that was not about their relationship but about their own role in the world, each now a less-than-sovereign region (one of North America, one of Western Europe), each mindful of its former past and port in an imperial nexus, each suffering as much from nostalgia as from loss of political and economic clout.

That said, these papers are interesting for three reasons. First, as history. Alastair Buchan in his all-too-short and evocative memoir, and Norman Hillier in his study of O. D. Skelton vividly convey the old for is it old? regime: when the Canadian tie was not with the Raj or the "Anglos" but with the lone shilling on the misty island, and all of them from Cape Breton to Vancouver, recalled—however mistily—the Hebrides, or the Gorbals, or Ulster. A substrand in the book is this recurrent Scottishness: especially vividly sketched in Skelton's psychological turning away from Canadian nationalism out of distaste for the Anglos: "British we were," he said, "but English in the sense of Southern English we never were." And one notes in John Holmes's balanced essay the throw away remark: "Now British professors are regarded as a welcome heaven (in this more favourable Canadian image of the British) earlier studies were on themes more manageable, if even less capable of solution, than this—imperialism itself, Malaysia, the military in Ghana—and sharper in focus."

Second, there is the striking omission in the collection: Harry Johnson and Arthur Smith discuss it in economic terms; but the central fact in the thin bilateral links between Ottawa and London is, simply, Washington. It is the great economic glare dominating every aspect of Canadian economic and cultural life, dominating the training of Skelton and King et al. in their faith in London, the permanent brooding presence of the United States, and especially in the corridors of the old stuff goes down better than ever.

Money may talk in Canadian elections, but how is it to be produced the right noise is the critical matter. In the election of 1972 the Liberals put themselves too much in the hands of advertising experts and media men. These came up with a few massive, complex generalities about undefined frontiers translated into operational terms by quiet diplomacy. Canada at the Polls is edited by an American, but written by several Canadian political scientists of top calibre; its object is to explain in a detailed, professional way what an election in Canada means, who participates, what happens and with what results. The assumption of the editors and publishers is that the American public can best be served by learning some facts about Canadian politics analysed and presented dispassionately and in Canadian terms with no more than an occasional explanatory comparison with American practice. The result is an excellent book indispensable to an understanding of contemporary Canadian politics.

The Canadian political process has its origin in the representative system established in the late eighteenth century in the British colonies in North America left over from the American Revolution. Representative government inevitably focuses the attention of the voters upon the immediate and practical concerns, leaving to the colonial executives and the Government in London the broad, bewildering and often expensive problems of administration and general policy-making in the great world. This preoccupation with the local and particular has never been lost; Canadian politics are still very much concerned with local and provincial interests, with the needs and popular preferences and impressions. Ideology and general propositions about policy count for very little, and personal, professional and regional interests, ideas and prejudices count for very much, interests which are continental and/or international in character have long been obliged to come to terms in some way or other with this strong long-standing and well-entrenched view. How they do so is one of the major elements in the Canadian political drama.

One of the ways in to spend money, just how much was spent in the election of 1974 and where it came from are not easy to discover, but K. Z. Pajtel has done his best.

Devey did a masterly job. Of course, he had the advantage of some egregious errors by the Conservatives and the New Democratic Party, but even so, he worked to a brilliant "game plan". Leaving to the Conservatives the business of telling Canadians how to solve the problems of inflation and rapidly rising prices, he ordered his troops to concentrate on what the Liberals had done and would do to help particular interests to adjust to high prices. This came across as strong, well-defined, particular messages to farmers, pensioners, industrial workers, etc. while the Conservatives and New Democrats floundered around with plans to control wages and prices, or just prices.

Then Devey made leadership an issue. Canadians tend to admire intelligence in their leaders more than good looks and sexy-grinning. Devey did in Trudeau what he did in intelligence goes. Surveys showed that the Canadian public did think Trudeau more intelligent and more able than the Conservative or New Democratic leaders. Devey decided to capitalize on this, but he had been doing in 1968 during the period of Trudeau's rise. Trudeau may be intelligent, but he is also arrogant, rude and a bit of a snob. Devey therefore decided to use Trudeau under tight control working to prepared scripts delivered to the public

Spending and voting

By H. S. Ferns

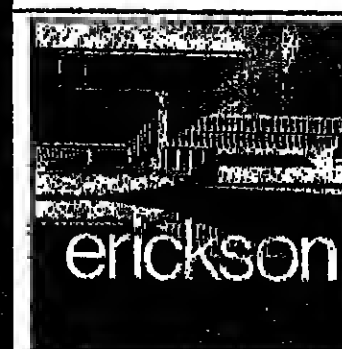
HOWARD R. PENNIMAN (Editor):
Canada at the Polls
The General Election of 1974
310pp. American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. Paperback, \$4.50.

The growing concern in Canada about Canadian election results, manifested in all the Canadian political parties has generated in the United States a disposition to study seriously what the Canadians are "on about," and to cease relying on a few massive, complex generalities about undefined frontiers translated into operational terms by quiet diplomacy. Canada at the Polls is edited by an American, but written by several Canadian political scientists of top calibre; its object is to explain in a detailed, professional way what an election in Canada means, who participates, what happens and with what results. The assumption of the editors and publishers is that the American public can best be served by learning some facts about Canadian politics analysed and presented dispassionately and in Canadian terms with no more than an occasional explanatory comparison with American practice. The result is an excellent book indispensable to an understanding of contemporary Canadian politics.

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The quest for Grove

By Alec Lucas

FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE:
The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove
Edited by Desmond Pacey
584pp. University of Toronto Press (Books Canada), \$Can 25.

This book is the last of many contributions to the late Desmond Pacey's "Grove" scholarship. His early studies, however, were not concerned with biography. He then developed "unquestionably" Grove's account of his wealthy, Old-World, Swedish-Scottish parentage, his hobnobbing with European intellectuals, and his hoping to America until he settled down in 1913 as a Manitoba school teacher. It is how Grove was "discovered" by the "Grove" that is the most interesting part of the book. Grove was a "discovery" of the "Grove" in 1879, a writer and acquaintance of Gladstone, George, a scoundrel, jailbird, powder, an alleged suicide. "To help in identifying Grove," says Pacey, "has included letters written when Grove lived in Germany (but does not mention the discovery in 1973 of parallel English and German texts of a Grove-Groves poem). The 520 letters of Grove's Canadian period (1913-48) also lift Grove's mask, for, when caught out on dates, Grove plonks bad memory, and when caught up in emotion, boasts of European editions of *Grove's* *Travels*. The rest is silence. Even in the intimate letters to his wife, he remains a "discovery" of "Ottawa," he brags, "in Duke and Lords; I'm at home among them."

Grove's letters reveal, little of Grove, but much of Grove. They present two Groves. The one is the

proud husband, the ambitious celebrity on lecture tour, the executive with Graphic Publishers. The other is the despair of an anatomy of his own life. There he found a largely matter of poverty and poor health (which breaking down almost entirely in 1944 left him an invalid) and a crushing sense of failure. Grove was a "discovery" of the "Grove" in 1879, a writer and acquaintance of Gladstone, George, a scoundrel, jailbird, powder, an alleged suicide. "To help in identifying Grove," says Pacey, "has included letters written when Grove lived in Germany (but does not mention the discovery in 1973 of parallel English and German texts of a Grove-Groves poem). The 520 letters of Grove's Canadian period (1913-48) also lift Grove's mask, for, when caught out on dates, Grove plonks bad memory, and when caught up in emotion, boasts of European editions of *Grove's* *Travels*. The rest is silence. Even in the intimate letters to his wife, he remains a "discovery" of "Ottawa," he brags, "in Duke and Lords; I'm at home among them."

Grove was human enough to have strongholds as well as weaknesses. His letters to his friends and to his wife and his comments on his son and the death of his warbird of thought disclose a welcome relief to the arrogance of many of them. In those to his wife, however, one wishes he had not mentioned her cost of his letters or included in almost every letter a aside reference to the joyful tidings that more letters were on the way. Indeed, whatever the Mr. Grove the letters reveal, Mrs. Grove's letters come through as a loyal and devoted wife.

Spectator
this week

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Hilary Spurling on
Emily Dickinson
William Trevor on
Anton Chekhov
Patrick Campbell on
the Irish question
A. L. Rawns on
the Duke of Monmouth
Take another look

20p

‘South Africa in Africa’

Islamic Sicily

—M. V. McDowdell, in a most interesting notice of *Asylar Ahmad's Military of Islamic Sicily*, takes a very restrictive view of Islamic influence in that country. He suggests that "the claim that the Sicily left any lasting influence in Italy of all seems rather hard to support."

To take one detail: should he give some importance to architectonic? I am thinking not only of the wonderful buildings as S. Ahmad's *Asylar Ahmad* gives, but of Palermo, but in particular that architectural reuse of ancient columns which was soon to determine a new set of ugly proportions for church architecture. The reuse of the columns robed in Sicily carry Islamic inscriptions; why must therefore have been first used for Islamic buildings before they were built into S. Cataldo and other churches? I am not sure, but whether the impressive reuse of whole forests of columns in Palermo exemplifies, if the hebe reusing ancient marbles on a Sicilian scale was not invented in Islamic Sicily, is certainly flawed. The adaptation of ancient buildings, which of course occurs in Sicily as it does elsewhere, is another matter; as is the decorative reuse of arches and walls. The originality and freedom of Islamic application of classical stones in Sicily astonishing and admirable, and influence has been lasting.

—J. B. LEVI
Campion Hoff, Oxford.

The English Association

Sir—As a contribution to the study and enjoyment of English language and literature, the English Association—now in its eventful 25th year—proposes to put out a guide for societies concerned with the subject. It is intended for use generally by individuals who are not necessarily scholars, and also for libraries, schools and the societies themselves. It will provide in a tabular form information about the various societies, their objects, the addresses of corresponding officers or secretaries, the terms of membership, the frequency and place of meetings, and some particulars of their publications. It will also give a number of films and confer-

The societies in the guilds should include not only the many which are interested in the study of an individual author (from Jane Austen to H. G. Wells) or a special field or period (bibliography to

Canadianists in conference

an establishment at Edinburgh of the Centre of Canadian Studies (the first of such centres in Europe), and the success of the first annual conference of the British Association of Canadian Studies (BACS), these reflect Canadian Studies (RACS), these reflect growing interest in Canada as a field for learning and research. The attention and the rise of individual centres of Canadian studies in Italy and Germany show how widespread the interest has become. At the same time, the rise of Canadian studies in the United States (political science, literary studies, May (French), and Alan Williams (geography) - Ted Allen (history) - and the rise of Canadian studies at the University of Vermont and currently the president of the American Association of Canadian Studies, the proliferation of Canadian studies in the United States; there

In Britain there are, of course, special reasons why Newfoundland has been singled out for importation and discipline. The fortunes of the two countries have long been intertwined. Undoubtedly the personal factor is important. For example, many of those at the BAOS conference have taught or done research in Canada, have married and brought up their children there, and are still members of Canadian learned societies.

In many British universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, Canadian studies have been a part of the Commonwealth American history, literature, law, or the geography of

North American. However—and this is a development those at the Birmingham conference were encouraged to hear—Canada is also becoming a center of advanced study for its own sake in a separate school or department.

Peppers at the conference strengthened the view that it is not enough to teach Canadian economics in the history, law, literature, etc. simply as the practical Canadian experience of the general theories of these subjects. The new drive goes to produce scholars who illustrate theories from Canadian examples, but to develop Canadianists who "will" look beyond their own country and understand the world to a concern for understanding of Canada itself.

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